

Satan, God, and the Angel(s) in 1Chronicles 21

PANCRATIUS C. BEENTJES, UTRECHT

Reading the Book of Chronicles, one is almost spontaneously inclined to take into account the parallel narratives as handed down in 2Samuel or 1-2Kings. In actual practice, it appears rather difficult therefore to approach the narrative of 1Chronicles 21 with an open mind. Time and again there is a threat that the reader is distracted from the plot of the Chronicler's narrative by snatches or reminiscences of 2Samuel 24.

In order not to miss the specific point(s) of 1Chronicles 21, first and foremost we will exclusively concentrate on the Chronicler's text, pretending not to know the existence of its parent text (I). Just thereafter, attention will be paid to the most important differences with 2Samuel 24 (II). Finally, we will discuss the presence of angels in the Book of Chronicles (III).

Part I: 1Chronicles 21

1. The Narrative Structure of 1Chronicles 21¹

The narrative in 1Chronicles 21 has been shaped in a well-built way. With respect of the main agents it is marked by three episodes: (1) David's initiative towards a census in Israel (21:1-6); (2) God's reaction (21:7-14); (3) The scene at the threshing-floor of Ornan (21:15-22:1).

1.1 David's initiative to number Israel (1Chr 21:1-6)

The opening words of the narrative immediately pose a problem which, according to the reader's choice, could involve far-reaching theological consequences. The matter touches the question in what way the Hebrew noun נָסָר in 1Chr 21:1 should be rendered. Until recently, it

¹ Text critical questions and notes are amply discussed in McKenzie, Chronicler's Use 55-58; 67-71; Knoppers, Chronicles 10-29, 743-750; Klein, Chronicles 414-417.

went without saying to consider it a proper name ('Satan'), a rendering that is found in almost every Bible edition and commentary. Lately, however, as a result of an increasing number of publications relating to this subject, the earlier massive view displays some cracks.

In order to make a well-founded decision in this matter, a short overview of the data is in order.² In the Hebrew Bible the noun נָשָׁר occurs 27 times, in eight cases of which it means 'a (military) adversary' (Num 22:22, 32; 1Sam 29:4; 2Sam 19:23; 1Kgs 5:18 [5:4]; 11:14, 23, 25). In Ps. 109:6 the noun נָשָׁר denotes the position of what nowadays is called 'prosecutor' or 'accuser'. It is of utmost importance to emphasize that in all abovementioned texts נָשָׁר occurs as an *indefinite* noun. In seventeen biblical passages which with no exception all are found in Job 1:6-2:7 and Zech 3:1-2, נָשָׁר is the designation of a heavenly being that in God's court of justice in heaven functions as the prosecutor. In all these seventeen occurrences the noun נָשָׁר is provided with the *definite* article.

Assuming that נָשָׁר in 1Chr 21:1 should denote such a heavenly being, one would expect a definite noun here, which is not! Therefore, it has much to recommend it that נָשָׁר should be interpreted here neither as a position 'prosecutor' / 'accuser' nor as a proper name ('Satan'). As an additional argument, one can point to the fact that in non-biblical Hebrew literature which is of considerable later date than the Book of Chronicles, נָשָׁר is never used as a proper name, but always in the sense of 'adversary' (e.g. 1QH 4:6; 45:3; 1QSb 1:8). As a proper name it is only found in documents, such as *Jubilees* (23:29) and *Ascensio Moysis* (10:1), that were written during the persecutions by Antioch IV (ca. 165 BCE). In sum, one should at least reckon with the possibility that 1Chr 21:1 refers to an unknown (military) adversary, who takes a stand against David.³

The mere fact that David ordered to number Israel is in itself no unusual phenomenon in a document that is full of lists and military registers (1Chronicles 1-9; 23-26). And moreover, it should be pointed out that later on in the Book of Chronicles several kings will carry out a census: Solomon (2Chr 2:17-18); Josaphat (2Chr 17:13-19); Amaziah (2Chr 25:5); Uzziah (2Chr 26:11-13).

As a matter of course, this brings us to the crucial question: what exactly was displeasing to God (21:7)? John Wright takes the view that it must have been *Joab's behaviour*.⁴ Joab disobeyed David's command,

2 See e.g. Day, Adversary in Heaven; Breytenbach / Day, Satan; Hamilton, Satan; Evans, Intermediaries; Kreuzer, Antagonist.

3 In his *Verdeutschung der Schrift*, Martin Buber for example has rendered נָשָׁר 'ein Hinderer' (someone who hinders, obstructs).

4 Wright, Innocence 95-99; see the reaction of Bailey, David's Innocence.

since ‘he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, for the king’s command was abhorrent to Joab’ (21:6).⁵ However, if Wright’s view would be correct, David’s reaction in verse 8 is hardly to understand, since in that case the only possible way out would be that David takes the responsibility for Joab’s decision not to include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering. David’s action in v.8, however, rather appears to refer to the numbering as such, which was the king’s decision. Now he realizes that it was a sin and a foolish act.

In my view, the key to the solution what is really going on in 1Chronicles 21 is what the narrator makes Joab say in verse 3. His response to David’s command consists of a wish and three questions which together should be considered a dam to prevent David’s plan.

Joab’s wish – ‘May YHWH increase the number of his people a hundredfold!’ (v.3) – could be interpreted as an allusion to God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 15:5; 22:17; cf. Deut 1:10-11). Another possibility would be that Joab wants to make it clear to David that it is God’s people and, as a consequence, the census needs God’s approval. Or would the real reason of Joab’s answer be that the people is already countless (cf. 1Chr 27:23)? Finally, one could take the view that David forgot to implement the instruction of Exod 30:12-16 – ‘When you take a census of the Israelites to register them, at registration all of them shall give a ransom for their lives to YHWH, so that no plague may come upon them for being registered ...’.⁶

The rhetorical question which is put forward by Joab – ‘Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord’s servants?’ – accentuates that a census is needless, since David can of course depend on every one in his kingdom. Subsequent to his rhetorical question, Joab formulates two sharp and concrete questions – ‘Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?’. The notion ‘guilt’ (**תִּמְשָׁא**) is a late, post-exilic Hebrew word (Lev 4:3; 5:24, 26; 22:16; Esra 9:6, 7, 13, 15; 10:10, 19) which in the Book of Chronicles without exception occurs only in the so-called ‘Sondergut’ passages (1Chr 21:3; 2Chr 24:18; 28:10, 13; 33:23).⁷

The notion **תִּמְשָׁא** refers to guilt which can only be annulled by atonement. Joab therefore is facing David with the consequences of his plan: the decision of one person, viz. King David, will bound to have repercussions on the people of Israel as a whole, as in Lev 4:3. David, however, wants to press home. So Joab departed and went throughout

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, biblical quotations are from New Revised Standard Version, Oxford 1995. Instead of ‘the LORD’, however, we have rendered ‘YHWH’.

⁶ See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, VII, 318.

⁷ See Kellerman, **תִּמְשָׁא** 429-437.

all Israel (1Chr 21:4). The route description of Joab's inspection contains the collocation 'from Beer-Sheba to Dan' (1Chr 21:2) which is an inversion of the current biblical formula 'from Dan to Beer-Sheba' (Judg 21:1; 1Sam 3:20; 2Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1Kgs 5:5). This latter collocation does go back not earlier as the exilic period and is to be considered an idealized description of Israel's territory.⁸ The fact that the Chronicler has reversed the classical order will have to do with the geographical and political situation of his days. In that time only Beer-Sheba was part of the Persian province *J^ehud*; Dan in fact was observed as a sort of pre-historic entity. That is the reason why in 2Chr 19:4 it is said: 'from Beer-Sheba to the hill country of Ephraim', since that was the factual border of Judah in the Chronicler's time.

On his return in Jerusalem, Joab gave the total count of the people to David. On the narrative level it is reported that Joab had not included Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, for the king's command was abhorrent to him (1Chr 21:6). Joab's decision not to number the tribe of Levi can be elucidated from the Book of Numbers:

'The Levites, however, were not numbered by their ancestral tribe along with them. YHWH had said to Moses: Only the tribe of Levi you shall not enrol, and you shall not take a census of them with the other Israelites' (Num 1:47-49).

'Just as YHWH had commanded Moses, the Levites were not enrolled among the other Israelites' (Num 2:33).

However, it is hard to understand why the Chronicler makes Joab not to number the tribe of Benjamin. The most obvious explanation would be that this non-numbering should be related to the holy status of Gibeon which in this narrative is still the cultic centre of Israel:

'The tabernacle of YHWH which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt-offering were there at that time' (1Chr 21:29).

Another plausible inference which in no way conflicts with the former one, would be that Joab's non-numbering of the tribe Benjamin prevents Jerusalem, which is a city on the boundary of Benjamin and Judah, from being 'contaminated'. For at the very end of this narrative (1Chr 22:1) it is precisely Jerusalem that will be pushed forward as the future site of the cult. In this respect it is absolutely no coincidence that the Chronicler in his genealogy of Benjamin earlier in his book (Chronicles 8-9) has explicitly paid attention to both Gibeon (8:29; 9:35) and Jerusalem (9:3-34).

8 Schoors, Berseba 119-129.

1.2 God's reaction (1Chr 21:7-14)

This middle section of the narrative is of a highly dramatic calibre. It starts with a negative tone: 'God was displeased about this thing' (v.7). In theory, 'this thing' could refer to Joab's decision not to number Levi and Benjamin (v.6), as is favoured by some scholars.⁹ The sequel of the narrative, however, proves beyond any doubt that the collocation 'this thing' in v.7 must refer to David's command to number Israel, which in fact is confirmed by David's confession: 'I have sinned greatly in that I have done *this thing*' (v.8).

Whereas the reader of the Book of Chronicles meanwhile is accustomed that David attacks (נָשַׁא) peoples and kings nearby (1Chr 18:1-12; 20:1-7), now it is *God* who strikes (נָשַׁא) Israel (1Chr 21:7; cf. 13:10). Quite a few commentators hold the view that the phrase 'he [God] struck Israel' anticipates the pestilence as recorded in 21:14 and should therefore be characterized as a 'proleptic summary'.¹⁰ Apart from the fact that the narrative in that case would display a rather complicated flashback layer, it should furthermore be emphasized that if it would be considered a proleptic summary indeed, verse 7 is unlinked from the previous episode (21:1-6). At the same time the question can be raised what might still be the function of verse 17 as related to verse 8.

The action of Gad (21:9-13) speaks against such a proleptic function, too. According to the common pattern of prophetic speech, in that case Gad should first have put forward an accusation ('Since you did this and that ...'), followed by an announcement of judgment / punishment ('Therefore ...'). In 1Chr 21:7-13, however, there is no accusation, since this aspect has already been set in motion by David in his confession of guilt (21:8). And it is not by accident that the king's exclamation has got a special lay-out in the Masoretic text. The verse is encompassed by a *p̄etucha*, by means of which these dramatic words of David are presented as a separate paragraph and get a special status within the narrative.

The seer who is sent to David by YHWH is called Gad, a name that ironically means 'luck'. He is also met in 1Chr 29:29 and 2Chr 29:25, always accompanied by the title נִזְמָן ('seer') which is one of the Chronicler's favourite nouns.¹¹ God's order at Gad's address is characterized

9 E.g. Wright, Innocence 98-99.

10 E.g. De Vries, Chronicles 171; Williamson, Chronicles 145; McKenzie, Chronicles 173; Dirksen, Chronicles 259; Klein, Chronicles 422.

11 From the seventeen times the noun occurs in the Hebrew Bible, it is found ten times (= 60%) in the Book of Chronicles. This is due to the fact that in enumerations of prophetic activities the Chronicler avoids to simultaneously apply the same title to two

by a deliberate retarding. The seer presents three options to the king, one of which he has to choose (v.9). However, it is just in a later stage (v.12) that David is told what those three options really are. They are submitted to him in a rather schematic form; this concerns both the temporal chain (three years – three months – three days) and the classical triplet (famine – devastation – pestilence). Whereas the first option is expressed very shortly (four words), the second one has nine words, the third even thirteen. From the perspective of the narrative technique this is no surprise, since the third option will – be it in an indirect way – actually be chosen by David.

The second and third options have been linked together with the help of the noun ‘sword’: ‘the sword of your enemies / the sword of YHWH’. Here we meet the only occurrence in the entire Hebrew Bible in which pestilence is called ‘the sword of YHWH’. It is also striking that the pestilence is personified as ‘the angel of YHWH destroying throughout all the territory of Israel’ (v.12). The verbal form ‘destroying’ (*mašhit*) is identical to Exod 12:13. 23, where it has a bearing on the final plague of Egypt.¹²

David’s answer on God’s choice between ‘the sword of the enemies’ and ‘the sword of YHWH’ is articulated in a particular shape:

‘Let me fall into the hands of YHWH,
for his mercy is very great;
but let me not fall into human hands’.¹³

In this *chiastically* structured answer (to fall – hand / hands – to fall) David expressly asked to exclude the second option, whereas he does not make a choice between the first and the third option. Thus YHWH sent a pestilence on Israel to the effect that seventy thousand persons – no doubt a symbolic number – were killed (v.14).

In fact, the narrative thus far is structured as a kind of *geographical inclusion*. It started with David’s command to number *Israel* (v.1) and the final effect of it is that YHWH sent a pestilence on *Israel* (v.14).

or three persons. Therefore, in 1Chr 29:29 Samuel is called נָבִיא (‘seer’), Nathan נָبָע (‘prophet’), and Gad נָבָע (‘seer’). In 2Chr 9:29, Iddo is called נָבָע, since he occurs in an enumeration with Nathan (נָבָע), whereas the same Iddo in 2Chr 13:22 is entitled נָבָע, as he is the only one mentioned there. See Schniedewind, Word 31-54.

12 In the Book of Chronicles the verb נְתַת (‘to destroy’) occurs sixteen times, by far the most (thirteen times) in the Chronicler’s own material (*Sondergut*).

13 An echo of this passage is found in Sir. 2:18.

1.3 The scene at the threshing-floor of Ornan (1Chr 21:15-22:1).

In v.15, the narrative zooms in on Jerusalem, specifically on the threshing-floor of Ornan, which is the scene where the remainder of the story will take place. As soon as YHWH saw the angel starting his mission of destruction, he repented (Gen 6:6; Exod 32:14). Whereas the Chronicler immediately informs his readers that YHWH puts a stop to the angel of death (v.15), is David still in a state of uncertainty. He sees 'the angel of YHWH standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem (v.16)¹⁴. No doubt this is a deliberate reference to Josh 5:13-14, which also presents a *hieros logos*, relating to the erection of a cultic site.¹⁵ Not until v.27 the threatening angel will put his sword into its sheath and he is feared by David till the end of the narrative (v.30). It therefore is the angel of YHWH who as an important agent – together with the geographical notion of 'the threshing-floor of Ornan' – constitutes an *inclusio* in the final part of the narrative.¹⁶

That David is accompanied by the elders is an indication that the situation is tense. For in the Book of Chronicles the elders do not frequently enter on the scene. It can hardly be a coincidence, however, that they are never absent at important political (1Chr 11:3; 2Chr 10:6, 8, 13) and cultic moments (1Chr 15:25; 21:16; 2Chr 5:2, 4; 34:29). The information that David and the elders are clothed in sackcloth not only highlights the dramatic effect of the narrative, but is also emphasizing the serious nature of the situation.

For the second time within the narrative David appeals to God (v.17). Just as the first time (v.8), it is a confession of guilt; but now it turns out to be a supplication. The rhetorical question which opens his plea, lays the emphasis exactly where it has to be: 'Was it not I [not Joab!] who gave the command to number the people?'. And in the next statement too he blames himself: 'It is I who have sinned and done very wickedly', using the same verb נָזַן ('to sin') as in v.8.¹⁷ Then attention shifts to those who, even though innocent, have tremendously been struck. This has been done with the help of a metaphor: 'these sheep,

¹⁴ The wording 'with his drawn sword in his hand' (v.16) undoubtedly reminds of the collocation 'the men who drew the sword', which occurs twice in v.5.

¹⁵ The phrase 'with his drawn sword in his hand' is also found in Num 22:23, 31.

¹⁶ The noun 'angel' is found in 21:15 [3 x], 16, 18, 20, 27, and 30; the noun 'threshing-floor' occurs in 21:15, 18, 21, 22, and 28.

¹⁷ The notion of 'David as repentant sinner' has amply been described by Knoppers, Images.

what have they done?'. At that very moment, the narrator for the first time puts the Holy Name ('YHWH') into David's mouth, which is no coincidence of course, since it occurs at a very strategic moment of the story and is also accompanied by the personal address 'my God'.

As far as Hebrew syntax is concerned, it strikes the eye that the Chronicler applies a grammatical construct *hārē'a h^arē'ōtī* (infinitive absolute + finite verbal form) which he usually tries to avoid in his work, even if it is found in his *Vorlage*. The question presents itself whether the infinitive absolute *hārē'a* should not be considered an error in writing of *hārō'è* ('the shepherd'). For in that case, the Chronicler's text not only would present a much more balanced double parallelism, but also offer a perfect metaphor in the second half:

I commanded to number the people // I have sinned,
I, the shepherd, have done wickedly // but *these sheep*, what have
 they done?¹⁸

And indeed, the variant reading *hārō'è* ('the shepherd') has been documented in the first Samuel Scroll from Qumran (4QSama^a), and has also been handed down by the Greek translation of 2Sam 24:17, which is rather dissimilar from the Masoretic text.

David's supplication – 'Let your hand, I pray, YHWH my God, be against me and against my father's house, but do not let your people be plagued!' (v.17b) – harks back to v.13, where the motif of 'God's hand' dominated David's choice: 'Let me fall into the hands of YHWH, for his mercy is very great'. One should also notice the rhetorical device '*your people*', which often in the Hebrew Bible is specifically used to put God on the spot.

The reaction to David's confession of guilt and his supplication is quite remarkable. For a new pattern of communication shows up, since it is *the angel of YHWH* whom is given the task of instructing Gad, who in his part has to deliver the message to David that he should erect an altar to YHWH on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite (v.18). With the phrase 'David went up following Gad's instructions, which he had spoken in YHWH's name' (v.19), the author creates the opportunity meanwhile to inform his readers what is enacting on the threshing-floor: 'Ornan turned and saw the angel' (v.20a).

The lapidary phrase 'Ornan continued to thresh wheat' (v.20b) is not as harmless as it looks, because it calls to mind the story of Gideon in Judg 6:11, which – just as Josh 5:13-14 – is part of a *hieros logos* too. And the collocation 'at its full price' (**בכָסֶף מְלָא**) in 1Chr 21:22, 24 -

¹⁸ As to the quite complicated textual history of the Chronicler's *Vorlage* in Samuel, see Klein, Chronicles 28-30; Knoppers, Chronicles 1-9, 55-71; Pisano, Additions 61-66; Rofé, 4QSama^a; Ulrich, Qumran Text 86-93; 156-159.

which is found only one more time in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 23:9) – refers to a holy site, too. It is the story that Abraham buys the cave of Machpela to bury his wife Sarah.

In fact, all kind of things appear to happen simultaneously, since all agents have been situated in the neighbourhood of the threshing-floor. The angel of YHWH is there all the time, since his appearance is already mentioned in v.15. Ornan is at work there; David who according to v.16 must have been nearby is on his way.

Finally, David built an altar to YHWH on the threshing-floor and has therefore carried out God's order (v.18). Then, for the very first time in 1Chronicles 21, YHWH himself responds in a direct way: 'He answered him [David] with fire from heaven on the altar' (v.26).¹⁹ Only now YHWH commands the angel to put his sword back into his sheath (v.27). But even then David continues to be afraid of the angel's sword (v.30).

Part II: 2Samuel 24

2.1 The context

There is a huge contrast with respect of the *context* of 1Chronicles 21 and 2Samuel 24. The opening of 2Samuel 24 – 'Again the anger of YHWH ...' – has a bearing on an earlier narrative, in which God's anger was at issue too (2Samuel 21). As a result of this very referral, the literal and theological function of 2Samuel 24 is completely different from the one in 1Chronicles 21.

Whereas 2Samuel 24 in fact is a kind of an *appendix*, the narrative of 1Chronicles 21 on the contrary is of outmost importance, since it is the introduction to a substantial section of the Book of Chronicles relating to various aspects of the future Temple. The narrative of 1Chronicles 21, therefore, has an important *programmatic function*. For this narrative explicitly links the threshing-floor of Ornan to the site of the future Temple (21:28-22:1), a motif that is explicitly resumed in 2Chr 3:1. In 2Samuel 24, however, such a connection is nowhere to be found; its focus is rather constituted by the relationship between the purchase of the threshing floor, the erection of an altar, and the end of the plague (2Sam 24:21, 25). There is no reference, not even an allusion, to the future Temple.

¹⁹ A parallel to 2Chr 7:1 urges itself upon the readers. See also Lev 9:24 and 1Kgs 18:38. It is no accident that in 2Chr 3:1 the site of the Temple is not only identified as Mount Moriah, but also as the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

2.2 Textual differences

It is not only the *context* of 1Chronicles 21 which considerably differs from the parallel narrative in 2Samuel 24, also the *text* of 1Chronicles 21 in many details varies from the parallel narrative.²⁰ Ever since three collections of fragments of the Book of Samuel were discovered at Qumran, there is a scholarly discussion whether the Chronicler's Hebrew *Vorlage* of Samuel was based on the Masoretic text type we know or on a Hebrew text type of a different kind.²¹ The lacunary fragment of 2Sam 24:16-20 in 4QSam^a, for instance, has some similarities with the Hebrew text of 1Chronicles 21, which are not handed down in the Masoretic text of 2Sam 24:16-20. As an example we refer to 'the angel with his drawn sword in his hand' in 1Chr 21:16. The matter, however, is even more complicated, since the Greek translation of Samuel in many instances agrees with the Hebrew text of Chronicles against the Masoretic text of Samuel.²²

On the basis of this complex set of data, we can at least reach the cautious conclusion that the Chronicler utilized a *Vorlage* of Samuel that was not identical to the extant Masoretic text. At the other hand, I think it unprovable that the Chronicler's Hebrew text of 1Chronicles 21 as we have it now would be a mere copy of the Samuel text type he had in front of him. There are too many instances in his narrative where we can detect his signature. Some of these we will briefly discuss now.

1. The phrase 'Why should he [David] bring guilt on Israel?' (1Chr 21:4b) can with certainty be ascribed to the Chronicler. First, since the notion 'guilt' (**חַטָּאת**) is a late, post-exilic Hebrew noun that in the Book of Samuel does not occur at all. And second, because in the Book of Chronicles it is only found in the so-called '*Sondergut*' passages.²³

2. In my view, the Chronicler's signature can also be seen in 1Chr 21:7 – 'He [God] struck Israel'. It can hardly be coincidence that the verb **נִקְרַב** is used here in respect of God, whereas in the same episode of the Samuel narrative it has a bearing on David: 'David was stricken to the heart' (2Sam 24:10).

3. Since the focus of the Chronicler's narrative is to safeguard the future Temple site, two times the noun **מִזְבֵּחַ** is expressly used (1Chr

²⁰ Most useful overviews of textual differences are offered by Braun, *Chronicles* 213-215; Klein, *Chronicles* 414-417; Knoppers, *Chronicles* 10-29, 743-750. The synopsis of Bendavid, *Parallels* 63-65, is of great help too.

²¹ The Samuel material from Qumran has been published by Cross, *Qumran*.

²² Lemke, *Problem*; Ulrich, *Qumran*; McKenzie, *Chronicler's Use*, 41-81; McCarter, *I Samuel*; McCarter, *II Samuel*; Brunet, *Chroniste*.

²³ 1Chr 21:3; 2Chr 24:18; 28:10, 13 [3x]; 33:23.

21:22, 25), which does not occur in the source text (2Samuel 24). The same noun will show up again in 2Chr 3:1, where the Chronicler not only refers to the threshing-floor, but also to Mount Moriah as the site of the Solomonic Temple.

4. One can understand why the Chronicler makes David pay such a huge amount of money to Ornan: 'six hundred shekels of gold' (1Chr 21:25), whereas in 2Sam 24:24 the site is sold for 'fifty shekels of silver'.²⁴ The future Temple site is invaluable and the price for it should by any means exceed the amount of money that has been paid for other cultic sites, such as the 'four hundred shekels of silver' which Abraham paid for the cave of Machpela (Gen 23:15).²⁵

5. David's offerings and call to YHWH are answered with 'fire from heaven on the altar' that David had just erected (1Chr 21:26). Here we undoubtedly come across the Chronicler's signature, since the same concept is also found in 2Chr 7:1, at the very moment Solomon has ended his prayer at the occasion of the Temple's dedication.

6. It is beyond any doubt that the emphasis on Gibeon as the cultic place during David's (and Solomon's) reign is a special topic of the Book of Chronicles, which by the way is constantly found in the Chronicler's *Sondergut* (1Chr 16:39-42; 21:29-30; 2Chr 1:3-6).

Part III: Angels in the Book of Chronicles

3.1 The Chronicler's attention to angels

In the Book of Chronicles, angels appear on the scene only twice, both times in the Chronicler's source material (1Chronicles 21; 2Chronicles 32).²⁶ Since due to text critical questions 1Chronicles 21 in fact is the most complicated text, first attention will be paid to 2Chr 32:21.

Whereas the Book of Kings, as well as the Book of Isaiah, offer an ample report of the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army, the illness of King Hezekiah, and the arrival of the Babylonian embassy (2Kgs

24 The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi interpreted the difference between 'fifty shekels' (2Sam 24:24) and 'six hundred shekels' (1Chr 21:25), saying that David paid fifty shekels for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

25 As we have noticed, there is a deliberate reference to this narrative by the unique expression 'as its full price' (1Chr 21:24; Gen 23:9).

26 'Und es ist keine Frage, daß der Chronist außer diesen Engeln noch mache andere gekannt hat'; Rothstein / Hänel, Kommentar xiv. A purely psychological remark without consequences!

18:9-20:19 / Isa 36:1-39:8), has the Chronicler a totally different narrative pattern. Out of a total of four chapters that he has devoted to Hezekiah, no less than three chapters deal with religious and cultic reforms this king has carried out (2Chronicles 29-31). His confrontation with the Assyrian army, therefore, has been given much less lines (2Chr 32:1-23) than was the case in his source.

Focussing now on the role the angel plays in both narratives dealing with the siege of Jerusalem, one can observe a change which from a theological point of view is quite interesting:

2Kgs 19:35 / Isa 37:35

That very night the angel of
YHWH set out
and struck down
one hundred and eighty-five
thousand
in the camp of the Assyrians.

2Chr 32:21

And YHWH sent an angel
who cut off²⁷
all the mighty warriors and
commanders
and officers
in the camp of the king of Assyria.

The Chronicler had adapted his source text in such a way that the real agent of the Assyrian defeat was not the angel, but YHWH himself. In other words, the Chronicler has adjusted his *Vorlage* for theological reasons: the angel indeed acts as God's messenger.

This aspect also comes to light when the narrative of 2Samuel 24 is compared with the one in Chronicles 21. There are two specific moments where one can ascertain that texts have been altered in respect of angel's activities:

2Sam 24:16

But when the angel
stretched out his hands
towards Jerusalem to destroy it ...

1Chr 21:15

And God sent an angel
to Jerusalem to destroy it ...

In 2Sam 24:16 the angel is put on the scene all of a sudden and acts autonomously, whereas in 1Chr 21:15 he arrives on the scene as a messenger of God acting according to God's command.

27 Instead of the verb נִכְרֵת, which is one of his favourite verbs, the Chronicler has chosen the verb נִנְכַּר, which must be an intentional reference to Ex. 23:23.

Some lines later, the same pattern can be detected. Here the Chronicler has even sacrificed the vehicle of direct speech to make his theological view perfectly clear:

2Sam 24:18

That day

Gad came to David and said to him,
'Go up
and erect an altar to YHWH ...'

1Chr 21:18

Then the angel of YHWH

commanded
Gad to tell David
that he should go up
and erect an altar to YHWH ...

3.2 How many angels in 1Chronicles 21?

The fact that in 1Chr 21 the noun 'angel' occurs nine times, whereas it is found only four times in his source text, poses the question how many angels are actually acting in the Chronicler's narrative.²⁸ Therefore, we need a quick outline of how they are called in the narrative. As a matter of fact, this is done in quite different ways: 'the destroying angel' (v.12, 15²), 'the angel of YHWH' (v.15), 'the angel of YHWH with a drawn sword in his hand' (v.16), 'the angel of YHWH' (v.18), 'the angel' (v.20), 'the angel putting his sword back in its sheath' (v.27), 'the sword of the angel of YHWH' (v.30).

At a first glance, there seem to be two of them: 'the destroying angel', and 'the angel of YHWH'. In my view, the key to this riddle should be found in verse 12, where the Chronicler (or his *Vorlage*) has substantially expanded the source text.

2Sam 24:13

Or shall there be three days'
pestilence in your land?

1Chr 21:12

Or three days
of the sword of YHWH,
pestilence on the land,
the angel of YHWH
destroying throughout all the
territory of Israel.

28 1Chr 21:12, 15 [3x], 16, 18, 20, 27, 30; 2Sam 24:16 [3x], 17.

In 2Sam 24:13, the third choice offered to David consists of one single item ('pestilence'). In 1Chr 21:12, however, it has been expanded into a set of *three coordinate* items, of which 'pestilence' is the middle one. This literary feature is solid proof that the 'destroying angel' and the 'sword of YHWH', which further on in the narrative is personified as 'the angel with the drawn sword' are to be conceived as one and the same agent. The fact that starting from verse 15 onwards the Chronicler's version gets a high degree of simultaneousness may serve as an additional argument to the view that there is only one angel doing the job.

Abstract

The Chronicler's version of David's census (1Chronicles 21) both from a text critical and from a theological point of view is quite different from its parent text (2Samuel 24). It appears that the Chronicler's text at several instances has adopted allusions to biblical material that refer to cultic sites. So doing, the Chronicler want to emphasize that the narrative is about the future Temple site.

The author of this contribution reaches the conclusion that several features in the narrative make a reasonable case that it was the Chronicler who reworked the Samuel narrative instead of just handing down an existing *Vorlage*.

Although angels are mentioned rather often in the Chronicler's narrative, at a closer look it appears to be one and the same agent all the time.

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